

Ale and Farewell: the German style of brewery architecture

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This article attempts to compare national styles of brewery architecture during the late nineteenth century, a time of world-wide activity in the brewery construction industry. In Britain, the number of large-scale brewery sites of architectural interest peaked at around 600 at the turn of the century, with about 100 of these being major sites. Their architectural development has been described elsewhere, but in summary these breweries generally had emphatic vertical features including a chimney and a multi-storey brewing tower, often with an elaborate ironwork crown, an ornamental exterior making much use of trademarks, and minimal interior ornament apart from inside the offices.¹ Normally the tower, the lower fermentation block and the ancillary buildings, including stables and cooperage, were arranged around a yard. Some of the rather earlier Burton buildings were massive flat-roofed structures with row upon row of round-headed windows. Smaller buildings in this plain style did form part of later breweries, but were not seen as the public face of the brewery, whose architectural style varied, taking its cue from the eclecticism on view in the urban surroundings.

The visual image of the 'beer factory' had become increasingly important, with the brewery's image being used on bottle labels and in advertisements. Barrett's Vauxhall Brewery (1885) was an extreme example of this trend, with a 119 feet high brewhouse tower topped by a huge, illuminated revolving stout bottle. It has been suggested that the design of yard-based industrial complexes harks back to the plan form of medieval monastic sites, but brewers in general do not appear to have been anything other than functional in their approach to brewery design.² Ornament was useful as advertising, architectural elements allowed the brewery to be perceived as a respectable part of the townscape, and the yard performed an essential function in relation to the distribution of the brewery's products. Rather than trying to liken their workplaces to castles or cathedrals, brewers may have reserved their architectural fancies for their homes; an instance is the lavish pictorial tiling, including a depiction of the Stag Brewery in Pimlico, which formed part of the 1885 decoration of the Watney family home in Berkshire.³

The story was different abroad, where the dominant form of beer production by

the turn of the century was bottom-fermented lager, commercially produced from around 1842 at Pilsen in Bohemia, now the western end of the Czech Republic. The nineteenth century surge in railway construction allowed Pilsener-style lagers, which were also brewed in Germany, in neighbouring Bavaria, to be transported around Europe. Mass emigration ensured that beers in Pilsener, Bohemian or Bavarian style - and the breweries to produce them - were soon found in North America and eventually throughout the world; a few lager breweries were even built in Britain. The lager brewing process differed from traditional British beer production, its most noticeable consequence in architectural terms being the extra space required for long-term cool storage or 'lagering' during fermentation; caves and underground cellars were initially used for this purpose, eventually being replaced by above-ground icehouses and then large, mechanically refrigerated structures.⁴

German-style lager quickly became popular in North America, after its introduction by German immigrants reaching America during the 1840s. Many of them settled in the midwest, and following the Civil War of 1861-5, professional engineers and architects, often trained in Germany, began to specialise in brewery design; Chicago (Illinois), a noted brewing city, was the base of many brewery architects.⁵ The background from which these architects emerged was one of a growing nationalist movement in Germany, and in particular Bavaria,

where one of its architectural expressions was the construction of a series of picturesque castles. The contemporary search for a truly German architectural style resulted in a combination of renaissance and gothic elements known as the Rundbogenstil, which was able to cope with the new building types required by industrialisation. Appel suggests that this specifically German heritage conditioned the style of American brewery architecture. It expressed the often German background of the brewers, 'who took pride in making their buildings attractive additions to urban environments', while their breweries 'symbolised the German impact on American culture, ethnically, socially, and technologically'.⁶ The name Rundbogenstil was rarely used in America, buildings in this style being referred to by a variety of terms including Byzantine, Lombardic, Romanesque and, eventually, American round-arched style.

Visually, the German-style American brewery displayed a multiplicity of round-headed windows or louvred openings, ornate detailing on gothic towers and chimneys, stumpy battlements on polychromatic brick buildings four to five storeys high, and often a picturesque roofline. A Gambrinus figure was occasionally added to mark a significant element, often a gateway.⁷ By the 1880s these lager breweries were being constructed on a vast scale, with Cincinnati (Ohio) the leading brewing centre until it was displaced by St Louis (Missouri) in the early 1900s [Fig. 1]. Inside were dec-



Figure 1. The Schorr-Kolkschneider brewery (now demolished), one of the 50 or so breweries in production in late nineteenth century St Louis.

orative elements similar to those found inside many German brewhouses, notably tiling and stained glass, often bearing brewing-related imagery. An example from Detroit (Michigan) is the 1912 brewhouse built for Stroh's Lion Brewery by the German firm of Topf & Sons from Erfurt; this had hand-painted tiling from the local Pewabic Pottery, a nationally-known arts and crafts pottery established in 1903.⁸ There might also be a 'German room', a brewery tap with a German theme, as at the F.W. Cook Brewery in Evansville (Indiana), built in 1893 and designed by the Chicago-trained architect August Maritzen, who worked on a total of about eighty brewery projects during the late nineteenth century.

An example of the German influence on early American brewing can be found in the city of Buffalo (New York State), where many of the leading businessmen were of German origin. Several small

breweries were established there in the 1840s, and by 1896 there were 19 large firms including Germania, Magnus-Beck, Gerhard-Lang and the German-American Brewing Company. Most of these large breweries were still managed by their German-American founders or their descendants. The huge scale of some of the turn-of-the-century breweries is illustrated by Portner's Brewery in Alexandria (Virginia), established during the Civil War and extending over four blocks in area by 1895, and the Lemp Brewery in St Louis (Missouri) [Fig. 2]. Adam Lemp established his lager brewery in St Louis in 1841-2, his son William J. Lemp moving to a new site and expanding the plant until by the 1870s it was the city's largest. The firm was the first to introduce coast-to-coast distribution of its beers, and the brewery eventually covered five blocks. Topping all of these was the mammoth Anheuser-Busch Brewery complex in St Louis, which covered 45 city blocks by

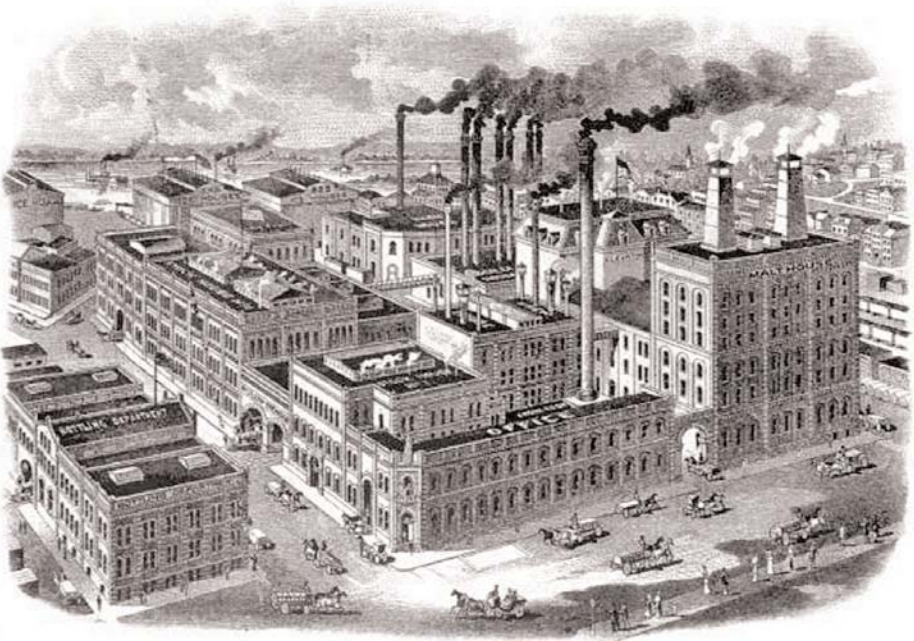


Figure 2. The Lemp Brewery, St Louis; its vertical features included at least 10 chimneys as well as the pair of malthouse stacks.

the 1890s; most of the buildings were designed by the firm established by the German-born and German-educated architect Edmund Jungenfeld (died 1884) [Fig. 3].

Although breweries could rival other American industrial buildings in terms of sheer size, Bradley's study of American industrial architecture points out that breweries were generally far more ornamental than other factories, their elaborate detailing serving to emphasise the good taste and importance of the owner while playing down the 'technically

advanced aspects of the facilities'.⁹ Perhaps this is only to be expected from a building type which hovers on the cusp of agriculture and industry; in any case, conflicts between historicist facades and functional interiors tend not to disturb industrialists.¹⁰ Even in the 1770s the potter Josiah Wedgwood was considering adding battlements to the design of the front elevation of his new Etruria Works at Stoke-on-Trent.¹¹ Although battlements - possibly a reminder of Bavarian castles - were a more common feature of the German-American round-arched style brewery than the British



Figure 3. A 1911 postcard showing the barley cleaning house and elevators at the Anheuser-Busch Brewery, St Louis.

ornamental brewery, there were many architectural similarities between late nineteenth century American and British breweries; however, the British version was normally smaller, displayed more stylistic variation and had a much less ornamental interior.

Immigrants from the British Isles played a large part in Australia's brewing history, but the climate made it difficult to make British-style top fermented ales, and it was not until lager was introduced that the numerous small-town breweries - often with something of the British ornamental brewery appearance - began to disappear and production was taken over

by much larger concerns. The brothers William and Ralph Foster came to Melbourne from New York in 1887, bringing with them one Mr Sieber, a German-American brewer who had studied in Germany. They built a lager brewery in Melbourne, using equipment imported from America, and their product was on sale by 1889.¹² It proved popular, and by the 1930s almost all Australian-brewed beer was lager.

In 1870s Australia, the state of Victoria was noted for its beer drinking, and several large-scale breweries were constructed especially in Melbourne, whose first mayor was a brewer. The Yorkshire



Figure 4. The brewhouse tower of Melbourne's Yorkshire Brewery, which has now been converted to apartments; other brewery buildings, including the stables, have been demolished.

Brewery (1876) was designed by the architect James Wood, son of the brewery's owner, who had established the firm in 1858 [Fig. 4]. It was one of Wood's earliest commissions, and he went on to become well known for designing gentlemen's town houses. The six-storey polychrome brick tower of the Yorkshire

Brewery was the tallest building in Australia for ten years after it was built; its mansard roof is a French-inspired element. Melbourne's Victoria Brewery was founded in 1854 by the Scottish brewer Thomas Aitken. Its first brewhouse tower was built around 1882 and designed by the architect George Wharton; a second



Figure 5. The massive lager beer cellars (1895) of the Victoria Brewery, Melbourne.

brewhouse has a German-style tiled interior. The splendidly castellated lager beer cellars were added in 1895 by the architect William Pitt, who also designed numerous non-brewery buildings in Melbourne in a wide range of styles; Pitt collaborated with the German-American brewing expert Augustus Metzler on the design of the cellars [Fig. 5].

Although this article has only touched on British, American and Australian breweries, it is clear that - Britain aside - the industrial-scale breweries of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were lager breweries, strongly influenced by the architectural and brewing traditions of German-born and German-edu-

cated architects, brewers and their descendants. Australian breweries were rather more eclectic, borrowing from England and France as well as Germany, but the German/American influence appears to have spread throughout the brewing world; for instance it was an American company, Wiegand & Copeland, which started an experimental brewery in Yokohama. Following this, the Japanese government sent a researcher to Germany with the intention of establishing a Japanese brewing industry. However, it is interesting to note that breweries, at least in Britain and America, appear to display more ornament than other contemporary industrial buildings; it could be said that breweries are more

likely to resemble each other than to be like factories of the same nationality. Further work needs to be undertaken on brewery architects, their involvement in non-brewery work and the relationship of breweries worldwide to the broader range of industrial buildings in order to draw any firm conclusions.

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